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PARIS PLEASE PASS TO SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2017  
TAGS: [IS](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: SINIORA REQUESTS INCREASED MILITARY  
ASSISTANCE AND MOVEMENT ON SHEBAA

Classified By: DCM Bill Grant, Reason: Section 1.4 (b).

SUMMARY

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11. (C) In a 6/25 meeting with CODEL Issa, PM Siniora requested continued U.S. security assistance so that Lebanon's army could carry on its fight against Palestinian militants and other extremists. Siniora said that once the Nahr al-Barid operation is completed, he wants to "turn his attention" to the Palestinian extremist bases that are located along the Syrian border. Siniora stressed he doesn't necessarily want to become engaged in an endless sequence of costly battles, but believes that if the LAF is capably armed, it would serve as a deterrence to militant groups which previously had operated in Lebanon with impunity. Concerning his upcoming 6/26 meeting with the Secretary, the Prime Minister indicated he would be asking for her assistance with the Shebaa farms issue. Siniora assured Congressman Issa that his government would be willing to lead the fight at the United Nations for a transfer of the disputed territory to UN control and hoped the U.S. would see the potential benefits that he believes would accrue from a settlement of this long-standing issue. He argued that Hizballah would not enjoy any political gain from such a settlement, but rather, moderates and the process of negotiation would be incalculably strengthened. End summary.

12. (C) Prime Minister Fouad Siniora met with Rep. Darrell Issa, two House staffers and the DCM on June 25 at the Grand Serail. In an unusual departure from practice, PM Siniora met his guests alone, but it was clear from the filled anteroom that he was trying to get through an extensive schedule of meetings before he left for Paris to meet with the Secretary and French officials on June 26. Security levels in Beirut for pro-reform leaders is currently high in the wake of the attack the day before on UNIFIL forces in south Lebanon and the on-going operation in Nahr al-Barid in north Lebanon.

13. (C) PM Siniora quickly reviewed what he considered an accelerating campaign of terror and intimidation: the June 13 assassination of MP Walid Eido, Syrian-directed and supplied Fatah al-Islam (FAI) militants in Nahr al-Barid, yesterday's explosion near Khaim in South Lebanon that took the lives of five UNIFIL peacekeepers, the abrupt about face by the pro-Syrian opposition late last week toward the Arab League initiative, and finally, the on-again/off-again closure of border crossings by Syria. He described the events as a coordinated effort by Syria to intimidate Lebanon and lay the

groundwork for political chaos.

"WE WILL STAND FIRM"

14. (C) Despite the challenges, Siniora assured his visitors that his government would stand firm. He warmly welcomed the military assistance already provided by the U.S., but asked if more advanced weaponry and equipment could be provided as soon as possible. Siniora contended that FAI militants were in many ways better equipped than his own troops and had inflicted the majority of casualties on LAF soldiers by sniper fire. He specifically requested the expedited delivery of additional sniper rifles because, according to his ground commanders, they were proving effective in suppressing the more lethal militant fire. While expressing his gratitude for the assistance already rendered, he emphasized that now that the battle against Palestinian militancy was joined, it may prove to be an extended effort and his forces badly needed resupply of many categories of heavily-used munitions and equipment.

15. (C) The Prime Minister, who projected confidence and determination as he had in meetings last week, acknowledged he did not wish for his rather limited forces (LAF numbers approximately 57,000 troops) to be continuously engaged fighting extremists, but argued that if the international community would help him field a strong, capable army, the real advantage would be an increase in deterrence against militancy.

16. (C) In discussing his strategy, Siniora said that once the Nahr al-Barid operation is successfully concluded, he

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intended to address the very real problem of Syrian-supplied and Syrian-directed militants located elsewhere in his country, particularly Palestinian militant bases that sit astride the Lebanese-Syrian border, a proximity which allows them "to even receive their hot meals from Syria."

17. (C) With regard to Syria's oft-heard complaint that it is actually Al-Qaida that is generating the recent violence, Siniora said there were certainly Al-Qaida elements involved, but in his opinion, Al-Qaida has become so fractured in its organization that the current elements were primarily independent groups with a shared philosophy, but who would work with almost any sponsor, including Syria. Therefore, it was essential to deal with the extremist problem now, while the army enjoyed almost universal support and respect, and was beginning to receive the equipment it needed for the fight.

A RENEWED PLEA FOR CONSIDERATION OF SHEBAA

18. (C) Turning to a subject that he indicated he would discuss with the Secretary, PM Siniora maintained that if the U.S. and the West truly wish to change the calculus in Lebanon, they should seize the opportunity that will soon be afforded by the UN cartographers' report to SYG Ban Ki-moon. The Prime Minister seemed confident the report would show Lebanese ownership of the Shebaa Farms border area and would be asking once again for U.S. support for movement toward the transfer of control to the UN. Siniora said he fully appreciates the deep concern that Hizballah would react to a transfer with a claim of triumph, but he argued it would be a hollow and poorly-received boast.

19. (C) Siniora argued that if the process were handled through negotiation under the auspices of the UN, any transfer to UN control would be perceived in Lebanon and the Arab world as a victory for diplomacy and Arab moderates. Additionally, it would allow his democratically elected government to trap Hizballah with their own words, i.e. that the reason for the existence of the "resistance" is release

of Lebanese territory held by others. Would Hizballah attempt to shift their position to keep their armed militia? Siniora said most probably, but insisted such a move would be seen as "unjustified and desperate." He emphasized that most Lebanese support the democratically-elected government and most Lebanese, including many in the Shia community, want to see the end of all armed militias.

¶10. (C) The Prime Minister conceded there were several pitfalls, but asked the Congressman if there really was any other alternative to force the disarmament of Hizballah's militia. If the U.S. would assist, PM Siniora promised his government would take the lead at the UN in asserting Lebanon's claim and asking that international body to accept custody of the territory pending a definitive resolution, that may or may not be part of a larger regional agreement. Siniora said he would like to discuss with the Secretary what his government would do to move the process forward and hoped that the U.S. would be receptive. As he has with numerous other USG visitors since last summer, PM Siniora strongly maintained that the time is now right to make a dramatic and "critically important" breakthrough, which in his view, would greatly strengthen Arab moderates and set the stage for important diplomacy to follow.

¶11. (U) Congressman Issa has not reviewed this cable.  
FELTMAN